



2017 MICHIGAN DEER HUNTING FORECAST

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The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has compiled information hunters may find helpful before they hit the field this fall.

Know Before You Go

Part of hunting preparation includes reviewing and understanding pertinent deer regulations. Visit mi.gov/deer, which provides highlights of regulation changes, information about deer management and links to additional resources, such as deer check stations. Refer to the [2017 Hunting and Trapping Digest](#) and [Antlerless Digest](#), also available at [DNR Customer Service Centers](#) and license vendors, for a map of all deer management units (DMUs) and other regulation details.

Breeding Activity

The peak of breeding activity (the rut) for Michigan deer occurs prior to the opening of the firearm deer season on Nov. 15, with increased movement and activity beginning in late October. The peak breeding dates are fairly consistent statewide; however, does that are not bred during the primary rut, or fawns who are able to put on enough weight, are likely to be receptive to breeding about a month later. This breeding activity often occurs in mid-December and, though less intensive than the primary rut a month earlier, can lead to increased activity and daylight movement later in the season. Hunters can often take advantage of these increased deer movements. Archery hunting is very popular in late October and early November, followed by the busiest deer hunting day of the year – the opening of the firearm season.

What to Expect Across the State

The 2016 season, while seeing a decrease in hunter numbers, ended with a slight increase in harvest from 2015. Overall hunting success increased across most of the state in 2016, with slightly more than five out of every 10 hunters taking home at least one deer last season.

The winter of 2016 was relatively mild across the entire state. Low snowfall levels and above-average temperatures made for good deer survival conditions and great potential for this year's fawns. Spring had relatively mild weather as well, which is a major factor in both deer fitness and fawn survival. Due to these circumstances, this year both the overall

number of fawns seen and the number of twins and triplets across the state has increased. In addition to an increase in the number of fawns being reported, the overall number of deer being observed appears to be up as well.

The 2017 deer season is forecasted to have similar to slightly increased success rates compared to last year. See below for regional information.

Upper Peninsula

The Upper Peninsula has experienced two relatively mild winters the last two years. Though overall deer numbers are still lower than many hunters like to see, some areas have begun to recover from previous harsh winters nicely. As a result, DNR staff members recommended opening a few additional units to antlerless hunting this year. Deer management units open to public- and private-land antlerless permits include DMUs 055, 121, 155, and 255. DMU 122 will be open only to private land-antlerless permits. The open units are in the south central portion of the U.P., which typically has higher deer populations than anywhere else in the U.P. All other areas in the U.P. will not have antlerless licenses available.

In general, hunters should expect to see a slight increase from the number of deer they saw last year, with increases especially in 1.5- and 2.5-year-old age classes. Keep in mind that each area is influenced by local factors and conditions, which then affects deer density and sightings in that area. The largest bucks (heaviest and largest antlers) typically come from agricultural areas, but nice bucks also are taken from forested areas where access is limited and where they have an opportunity to get older.

Continuing for 2017: archery hunters may harvest antlerless deer only if they have an antlerless license. In the U.P., they may not use their single deer or combination deer license to take an antlerless deer during archery season. This change does not affect the Liberty or Independence Hunt and does not impact the mentored youth license.

New for 2017: DMU 117 (Drummond Island) has a new three-point antler point restriction on the single deer license (the antler point restriction on the regular and restricted tags of the combination license remains in place) and a one-buck limit for the entire deer season. This means any hunter participating in the deer hunting season on Drummond Island may only harvest one buck for the entire deer season, and that buck must have a least three antler points on one side, each 1 inch or greater in length. Drummond Island hunters may purchase a combination license, but the second tag must be used in any DMU other than 117.

Northern Lower Peninsula

The northern Lower Peninsula is expected to see an increase in deer harvest this year. With the mild winter last year and little impact from the previous winter, deer populations have been increasing steadily across much of the area.

Deer sightings have been good throughout the region, and many have reported seeing healthy fawns, including many sets of twins and even some triplets.

Many areas may see more 2.5-year-old and 3.5-year-old bucks this year with the now-permanent three-point antler point restriction (APR) in 13 counties in the northwest area. This APR allows the majority of 1.5-year-old bucks to mature to the next age class, resulting in increased numbers of 2.5- and 3.5-year-old bucks in the years following. All northern Lower Peninsula deer management units are open for antlerless hunting; refer to the [2017 Antlerless Deer Digest](#) if you are interested in obtaining an antlerless license.

New for 2017: DMU 487 no longer has an APR in place on the regular tag of the deer combination license. Hunters can harvest antlerless deer using either their single deer or deer combination license during the early/late antlerless firearm, archery, firearm or muzzleloading seasons, but the APR that had been in place since 2010 has been removed. Keep in mind that those who purchase a combination license still have a four-point APR on the restricted tag of the combination license, which is similar to the rest of the state. For a map of the different APRs in Michigan, see pages 32 and 33 of the [2017 Hunting and Trapping Digest](#).

Public-land antlerless licenses also have changed. Removed are the individual public-land units of DMUs 001 (Alcona), 004 (Alpena), 035 (Iosco), 060 (Montmorency), 068 (Oscoda), 071 (Presque Isle) and 135 (Tawas). All are now a part of DMU 487. Hunters who previously hunted public land under one of these licenses now can purchase a public-land antlerless license for DMU 487. This change opens more opportunities for hunters to move around public land in the six-county area. DMU 452, the core TB management area, remains separate from DMU 487 for public-land licenses.

Southern Lower Peninsula

Abundant food and cover in the form of agricultural crops and scattered swamps and woodlots provide very good habitat across the southern Michigan landscape. This high-quality habitat, combined with relatively mild winter conditions, typically results in a more abundant and productive deer population compared to other regions of the state. The 2017 harvest should be like last year, with perhaps a slight increase given the current conditions. Harvest in the southern Lower Peninsula can depend heavily on the percentage of standing corn. If corn harvest is delayed going into the firearms season, a reduced deer harvest can be expected.

Over the last decade or more, deer population estimates and indices (including deer/vehicle collisions, crop damage complaints, and observations of deer by the hunting community and field staff) in the southern Lower Peninsula have stabilized or declined. In many instances, reductions were intended to reduce conflicts that can occur when deer populations are high, though the DNR still desires to keep adequate deer for enjoyable hunting and viewing experiences. A relatively high proportion of land in this region is broken into small parcel sizes and privately owned. Given this framework, the DNR is working to find more ways to balance high-quality deer hunting experiences and increased hunting opportunities with habitat management goals among networks of private landowners and hunters.

The southeastern Lower Peninsula offers numerous reserved and lottery deer hunting opportunities at managed waterfowl hunt areas, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wildlife refuges and Sharonville State Game Area in Jackson and Washtenaw counties. Additional information related to these hunts can be found on the DNR [Reserved Deer Hunts](#) web page. A limited number of leftover licenses are available for these hunts; review the [leftover licenses](#) page and navigate to “Deer Reserved Hunts” on the dropdown menu for available quantities. Hunters seeking more information related to deer hunting opportunities at the DNR’s managed waterfowl hunt areas should contact either the [Nayanquing Point](#), [Fish Point](#) or [Harsens Island](#) field offices and speak with staff.

Additionally, an Urban Deer Management Zone has been developed for Macomb, Oakland and Wayne Counties (see section below). The archery season in these counties will extend to Jan. 31, 2018 to better manage human-deer conflicts. More information on the Urban Deer Management Zone can be found on page 35 of the [2017 Hunting and Trapping Digest](#).

Wildlife Health and Regulations

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Southern Michigan

Due to the CWD-positive free-ranging deer that have been found in Ingham and Clinton counties since May 2015, several regulations are in place to help monitor the disease:

- The creation of DMU 333 to surround the area where the positive CWD cases have been discovered. This area includes Bath, DeWitt, Eagle, Olive, Riley, Victor, Watertown and Westphalia townships in Clinton County; Alaiedon, Delhi, Lansing, Meridian, Wheatfield and Williamstown in Ingham County; Woodhull Township in Shiawassee County; Delta and Oneida townships in Eaton County; and, new for 2017, Roxand Township in Eaton County and Danby and Portland townships in Ionia County.
- Mandatory registration for all deer harvested in DMU 333. Deer heads must be submitted to a DNR check station within the DMU within 72 hours of harvest.
- The removal of the “four points on a side” rule on the restricted combination license for DMU 333.
- The ability to harvest an antlerless deer in place of a buck with a single deer or deer combination license during the firearm and muzzleloading seasons.
- The creation of a CWD Management Zone, DMU 419, which includes the parts of Clinton, Eaton, Ingham, Ionia and Shiawassee counties not included in DMU 333.
- A baiting and feeding ban in DMUs 333 and 419, along with increased antlerless quotas and reduced antlerless license costs.

In 2017, two CWD positive animals were reported from a captive deer facility in Mecosta County. Regulations established this year are meant to surround where these recent positive animals have been detected since last hunting season. Due to this situation, DMU 359 was created, which encompasses Mecosta, Austin, Morton, Hinton, Aetna and Deerfield townships in Mecosta County and Cato, Winfield and Reynolds townships in Montcalm County. DMU 359 has mandatory deer check. Deer heads must be submitted to

a DNR check station within the DMU within 72 hours of harvest. For more information on CWD, visit mi.gov/cwd.

Since the discovery of CWD in May 2015, over 14,000 free-ranging white-tailed deer have been tested and nine CWD positive animals have been identified. For the most up to date information and a map of CWD areas, visit mi.gov/cwd.

Because of the concerns associated with CWD, a new regulation prevents the transportation of deer, elk and moose carcasses harvested outside of Michigan from being returned to Michigan, except for antlers and clean skull caps, deboned meat, hides, quartered meat (that does not include any part of the spinal column or head attached), finished taxidermy mounts, and elk ivories. Previously, this regulation applied only to states with known cases of CWD. The regulation now has been expanded to include all states and provinces, regardless of their CWD status.

Bovine Tuberculosis

In the northeast Lower Peninsula, the prevalence of bovine tuberculosis (TB) in the core zone, DMU 452, showed a slight decrease last year. The rate in DMU 452 decreased from 2.7 percent in 2015 to 2 percent in 2016. The prevalence rate in the five-county TB Management Zone (DMU 487) remained the same in 2016, staying at 0.3 percent. Hunters are strongly encouraged to harvest antlerless deer to help maintain reduced deer numbers and keep TB in check. Older antlered deer also should be harvested and are especially important to be checked, as these animals are more likely to contract TB. Bringing in a deer or deer head to a check station for testing allows the DNR to track the prevalence of the disease in the population and informs hunters whether their deer has the disease.

The DNR encourages everyone hunting in the following counties to bring their deer head in for testing: Alcona, Alpena, Arenac, Cheboygan, Crawford, Huron, Iosco, Lake, Midland, Montmorency, Newaygo, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle and Roscommon.

To learn more about TB and other wildlife health issues, visit mi.gov/emergingdiseases.

Things to Consider

Expanded Urban Area Hunt

New for 2017: archery season has been extended in three counties in the southeastern part of the state. The archery season will now run through Jan. 31, 2018 in DMUs 050 (Macomb), 063 (Oakland) and 082 (Wayne). Any valid unused license, including antlerless licenses, will be available to be used during this time frame. This extension allows additional opportunities for archers and crossbow users to help manage deer that inhabit a largely urban landscape. The DNR is optimistic that this extension will provide a gateway for many local parks to allow hunting as a recognized form of deer management in these urban areas.

Where to Hunt on Public Land

The DNR offers an online tool named Mi-HUNT, an interactive web application located at mi.gov/mihunt, to help hunters hone in on good habitat and potential hunting spots. For

those who find themselves short on time, these tools are an excellent way to save some time and narrow down their selection.

Hunting Access Program

Looking for a place to hunt this year or interested in earning income to allow public hunting on your land? The DNR Hunting Access Program has 23,000 acres of private hunting land available this hunting season. Since 1977, HAP has supported Michigan's hunting heritage and this year expands to include the northern Lower Peninsula, offering many new properties. For more information about hunting HAP lands or enrolling your property, visit mi.gov/hap to find property information for each county, including location details and aerial maps. Each property offers specific types of hunting (all hunt types, youth and apprentice, turkey only, small game only, elk only or a combination of these).

Mentor a Youth Hunter

A shared experience with family and friends is one of the most cherished aspects of hunting. The DNR encourages hunters to share that heritage with a young person in their life. Under the Mentored Youth Hunting Program, it is possible to take a youth that is 9 years of age or younger deer hunting. For specific program requirements, visit mi.gov/mentoredhunting.

Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger Program

The Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger program is a wonderful way for hunters to share a part of their harvest this fall, or donate a whole deer. Since 1991, the organization has been working to help connect donors, wild game processors and charities that feed needy individuals. Together, they have assembled a network of processors and charities to help channel wild game donations into the hands of those in need. If interested in donating, please visit <http://www.sportsmenagainsthunger.org> for a list of participating processors.

Bring your Deer to a Check Station

Michigan has some of the best historical data on deer in the country. The data gathered at check stations and from the hunter harvest surveys helps the DNR make future management decisions and helps monitor the health of the herd. The time spent talking with hunters is invaluable to field staff. Be part of this important aspect of deer management by bringing your deer or deer head to a check station, along with information about where and when the deer was taken. As always, you will receive a successful hunter/deer management cooperator patch. Review our [deer check station list](#) for locations and hours.

Antler Point Restrictions (APR)

See pages 32 and 33 of the [2017 Hunting and Trapping Digest](#) for complete information on these regulations. Visit the APR Corner page located at mi.gov/deer for more information and history on APRs in Michigan.

Local Cooperative Opportunities

To assist hunters in meeting their local hunting objectives, the DNR has partnered with Michigan United Conservation Clubs, the Quality Deer Management Association and

Pheasants Forever to create the Michigan Wildlife Cooperative Program. This program, housed within MUCC, is designed to help neighboring landowners and hunters work collaboratively with each other, the DNR and other interested parties to achieve a common wildlife management goal. To learn more about this program or start a wildlife cooperative in your area, contact the wildlife cooperative coordinator, Anna Mitterling, at amitterling@mucc.org or visit www.mucc.org/cooperatives.